



**Representative
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Education
Rules

Joint Committee on Veterans
and Military Affairs

Joint Legislative Audit and
Review Committee



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35th District Report

Spring 2004

Dear friends and neighbors,

In legislative time, 60 days goes by in the blink of an eye. That's how it was in our January 12 – March 11 session this year; it seemed to be ending almost before it began.

In an ordinary short-session year, that's not much of a problem. The heavy lifting is mostly done during the odd-numbered years. That's when we write the biennial operating, construction and transportation budgets. That's when lawmakers have the luxury of time (105 days) to work on major legislation. In even-numbered years we have our short sessions. Often, making mid-course corrections to the budgets and finalizing legislation held over from the previous year are our main duties.

It wasn't like that this year. There was plenty of work to do to improve our schools, the state's economy and the accessibility and affordability of health care, as well as the usual budget adjustments and wrapping up of loose ends from the previous session. And leaving all this aside, the Legislature needed to select a primary-election model to replace the blanket primary that had been ruled unconstitutional. As chair of the House State Government Committee, a lot of that primary load was on my shoulders – and it was a load I welcomed.

We made some good strides in the right direction, and there were some stumbles, too. In the limited space we have available here, I want to take a quick look at how some of the major issues played out, and what it might mean to us here in the 35th District.

I know it's not practical in a mass mailing like this to pile on the detail, but I also know that on any given subject, someone reading this is going to feel a need for much more information than a newsletter can contain. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me throughout the interim with your questions, comments and suggestions. Either I or my legislative aide, Kim Moores, will do our best to provide you with the answers, information or assistance that you need.

It's an honor to serve as your state representative. I thank you for that privilege.

Sincerely,

Kathy Haigh
State Representative

P.S. A word about newsletters: These mailings can be costly, and at a time when every penny counts – in the state budget and in the family budget – I've managed to save taxpayers about \$30,000 in the 2003/04 biennium by cutting back on mass mailings. It's obviously important to keep in touch with the communities and people I represent, but I'm hopeful that my new website (<http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/members/haigh>) can take up some of the slack, at no extra cost to taxpayers. And whether you have Internet access or not, please remember that phone calls and letters are great ways to reach me.

Snapshots: Olympia 2004

Education Reform

My belief that our schools can and must improve, at every level, is what first energized me to run for public office. Even though I gave up my vice-chairmanship of the House Education Committee last year when I agreed to chair the State Government Committee, anyone who knows me understands that education remains one of my top priorities.

Last year, disappointed by the lack of progress on education reform, several of us in the House Democratic Caucus formed a task force during the interim to focus on education issues. We met with more than 60 groups of education stakeholders during the summer and fall of 2003. Our goal was to pare down the list of potential agenda bills to a manageable and achievable few, then hit the ground running on the first day of session. We had some important victories.

- **WASL Reform:** We firmed up graduation requirements for the class of 2008 and fine-tuned the testing procedures to make them more fair and effective.
- **Learning Assistance Program:** LAP dollars are intended to level the playing field for schools with special challenges. Unfortunately, when such schools begin to show improvement, the LAP funds are yanked. We did away with this Catch-22, so our schools can be rewarded, not punished, for succeeding.
- **Expanded Levy Fund Base/Levy Equalization:** Changes in these two areas will give local schools millions in extra funding next year, without imposing new tax increases on property owners. Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Mason and Thurston County schools will benefit by more than \$2 million.
- **Higher Education:** We were able to allocate \$17 million for new enrollment slots in public colleges and universities, almost half of it for high-demand fields such as nursing and computer science. We also upped funding for Washington Promise Scholarships by \$4.3 million.

I'm very disappointed that the Senate killed a common-sense bill to study the funding system we use to pay for the state's single largest budget item, K-12 schools. Several colleagues and I will nevertheless work on this during the interim, with a goal of producing a system that focuses on getting good results, rather than simply counting students.

I'm also convinced that community colleges and technical colleges are the unappreciated drivers behind Washington's economic strength, and I'm continuing my work to make sure they get the resources they need – including adequate pay for instructors.



Giving Washington Voters a New Primary System

As chair of the House State Government Committee, I've been working for more than a year under the unwelcome assumption that Washington's blanket primary would ultimately be declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court. That's exactly what happened, and it fell to my committee and our Senate counterparts to offer up a replacement that would satisfy most voters and, at the same time, be acceptable to the political parties that brought suit against the blanket primary in the first place.

I personally supported the sort of primary used in Montana. This model preserves voter privacy, respects the rights of third parties, and satisfies the desire of the major parties to have some assurance that the nominee of their party will embrace its basic philosophy. It was clear to me, though, that public sentiment was with the Louisiana model, in which the top two vote-getters in the primary advanced to the general election, regardless of party. Two Democrats, two Republicans, a Democrat and a Green – this primary would produce a strictly two-person race.

In the end, we produced what seemed like the only solution that made sense: We opted for the Top Two primary, but the bill specified that we would fall back to the Montana model if the parties sued to have the Top Two model thrown out. Had we not done this, a promised lawsuit from either party would have effectively wiped out a 2004 primary, leaving us the kind of general election in November that California had last year that featured more than 100 gubernatorial candidates.

For reasons of his own, Gov. Locke vetoed the Top Two model from the bill we passed, which automatically gives us the Montana model for our next primary. I suspect we'll be in court for years to come on this issue, but to be honest, I don't believe there is anything we could have done to avoid that. I don't know of many lawmakers on either side of the aisle who welcomed the original court challenge to the blanket primary. I don't know many who wouldn't be happy to see it return. But it's clear that this will not be happening, and for now, the Montana-type primary seems to be the best option at our disposal.

Snapshots: Olympia 2004

Health Care

We all know that health care is a growing crisis. Some politicians get a lot of mileage out of claiming they have simple answers to complicated problems, but this is one situation where there just aren't any easy solutions. We addressed health care on several fronts this session. I think the good news is worth talking about.



- **Healthy Kids:** We were able this year to undo some of the damage done by last year's budget, including rolling back hikes in Medicaid premiums for children in families with incomes up to 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.
- **Hospital Funding:** This year's budget gives local hospitals nearly \$20 million in new funding so they can continue to serve patients with no medical coverage.
- **Medical Insurance for Teachers and State Employees:** Going without raises for years at a time is one thing, but mushrooming health-insurance premiums can almost seem like piling on. This year's budget provides as much as \$25 a month more per teacher and state worker to help them pay for insurance premiums.

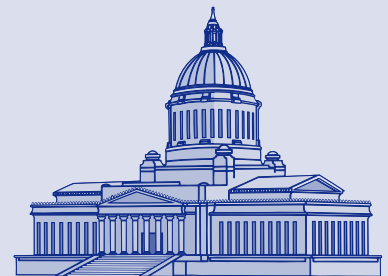


Conferring on the House floor about the primary-election bill with my friend and colleague, House Majority Leader Lynn Kessler of Hoquiam.

Accountability in Government

We had a good bill this year that would have empowered the State Auditor to conduct performance audits of state agencies, under the watchful eyes of an independent oversight committee. This is what government critics from every partisan stripe have been recommending for a long time. This is common sense. The governor had promised to sign the bill when it reached his desk. The performance-audit legislation got a bipartisan thumbs-up in the House, and then — like so many other good bills this year — it died because the Republican leaders of the state Senate refused to allow the members of that chamber to vote the bill up or down. No vote — period.

Accountability is the backbone of trust in state government. Washington citizens aren't stingy — they've shown that time after time. But we DO want to feel that our tax dollars are being well-spent, and we want to know that our agencies are as well-managed as I believe them to be. The performance-audit bill, which was killed by the same people who are most vocally critical of state government and state workers, could have demonstrated that Washington currently has one of the best, most efficient state governments in the U.S.



Rep. Kathy Haigh • 35th District Report

During the Interim

The Legislature may be adjourned for the year, but developing bills and holding floor votes are only part of what we do. My office at the Capitol is open and staffed year-round, providing all the constituent services that we offer during the legislative session. My legislative plate also promises to be a full one.

- **Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee:** Although we'll have to try again next year to give the State Auditor the authority and means to conduct agency performance audits, the fact is such audits have been conducted for years by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC), of which I am a member. I enjoy very much the work we do on JLARC, and we'll be wrapping up several audits in the coming months and presenting our findings. Anyone who would like to know more about this unheralded performance-audit group can visit the JLARC website at <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Legislature/InsideTheLegislature/LegislativeAgencies/JLARC/>.

- **Veterans and Military Affairs Committee:** As a member of this committee, I'll continue work that began during the 2003 interim – primarily, researching the economic impacts of military bases on nearby communities. Most of us think of bases as the best possible neighbors. Some communities point to occasional drawbacks, however, and we're looking at ways to mitigate these problems while hanging onto the bases, their personnel, and the economic benefits they provide. We'll also be looking into the operations of the veterans' hospitals in Spokane and Retsil, and the veterans' home in Orting.
- **State Government Committee:** We're looking this summer at ways to streamline the process of contracting out the designing and building of public projects. Even small across-the-board efficiencies in such massive areas can save millions a year in tax dollars.



*Aboard Naval Station
Bremerton's
USS Carl Vinson.*



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